Restructuring of the 1371 Military Occupational Specialty

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Restructuring of the 1371 Military Occupational Specialty

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to

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With new technical demands levied upon the latest generation of Marine combat engineers to counter evolving mine, munitions, and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) threats, answering the mission call introduces an unprecedented level of complexity to the 1371 Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Whenever operationally-required adjustments are made to further expand the 1371 MOS mission scope (as evidenced in the current operating environments of Afghanistan and Iraq), it should naturally beg the question of the engineer community's leadership as to whether or not the Individual Training Standards (ITS) currently prescribed to the 1371 MOS are both specialized enough and sufficiently trained to in order for combat engineers to safely and thoroughly perform in their growing lead and support roles on the battlefield.

To better adapt to 21st century combat engineering challenges, a breakdown of the 1371 MOS into more precise, mission-specific specialties is needed. A division of the 1371 MOS into two distinct categories – 1371 and 1372 occupational field specialty designators – must be affected in order to allow for increased depth of instruction in the respective MOS training programs. This division will ultimately ensure that engineers, equipped with the correct variety of trade skills, competently perform their roles in accordance with the mission requirements of the units to which they are assigned.

Background

Given the numerous expectations of the 1371 MOS —- from breaching, to Rapid Runway Repair (RRR), to general construction —- the Marine Corps engineer community presents unnecessary risk to itself by insisting upon too broad a range of ITSs for combat engineers. Developing and maintaining professional competency past initial MOS training proves challenging for many engineers, given that required training settings (including requisite material support to equip specific engineer training missions) cannot be provided due to the limitations of the supported unit or installation. As a result, instruction requirements that must be accomplished per engineer ITSs are not met. Because of such obstacles, not the least of which is high operational tempo, many skill sets are completely unexercised when an engineer is assigned to a distinct element of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) where there is no call for particular engineering requirements.

An engineer’s time during basic MOS training would be optimally spent in drilling down to the core competencies and technical requirements demanded by the MAGTF element environment to which that engineer is to be future assigned, i.e. the Ground Combat Element (GCE), the Aviation Combat Element (ACE), and the Combat Service Support Element (CSSE). Because not all combat engineer ITSs are required to comprise the distinct Mission

Essential Task Lists (METLs) specific to each MAGTF element, not all 1371 tasks can be practically trained to in order to maintain proficiency as required by the standard. [There are currently ninety-four different 1371 ITSs spanning the enlisted ranks, several unlisted on-the-job requirements, and still more contingency requirements borne out of combat operations abroad that have yet to be doctrinally reflected in revised ITSs for the 1371 MOS.[1]] Although combat engineer ITSs require evaluation or retraining at intervals ranging from quarterly to annually, many engineers will not receive the required instruction in certain ITSs due to the fact that their current units' METLs do not require those ITSs in order to operate.

Avoiding Skill Atrophy

Many skills associated with particular combat engineer ITSs are deteriorative, if not perishable, by nature, resulting from a combined lack of practical application and routine exposure to technical innovations and changes occurring in the occupational field.

By dividing the current manifestation of the combat engineer MOS (beginning with the revamping of basic-level enlisted instruction within Combat Engineer Instruction Company (CEIC) at Marine Corps Engineer School (MCES)], such instances

[1] Marine Corps Order 1510.95A, *Individual Training Standards (ITS) System for Engineer, Construction, and Equipment Occupational Field (OCCFLD) 13.* (Washington, D.C.: 2000) 13-15.

of skill atrophy can be systematically avoided. Through the creation and development of two engineer MOSs that focus on division engineer and group/wing engineer mission requirements respectively, the split-effort results will yield engineers that are more technically and practically trained in order to meet and overcome the challenges associated with the MAGTF element to which they are assigned to.

From The Current Operating Environment

Insurgent tactics and the uncertain battlefield environment that urban combat presents have forced combat engineers to expand their effective technical scope. New initiatives affecting engineer employment include the proliferation of IED prediction, detection, and defeat technologies.[2] Engineers have also provisionally adopted limited Captured Enemy Ammunition (CEA) destruction roles which were once exclusively associated with the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) community.[3]

Contributing to the argument of 1371 MOS split is an initiative that is currently underway to create a 1372 MOS to operate the forthcoming Assault Breacher Vehicle (ABV), a minefield and obstacle breaching platform expected to reach full

[2] "Mine/Countermine Operations," *Marine Corps Engineer School, Combat Engineer Instruction Company,* <http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mces/CEIC/Mine/Countermine Operations.ppt> (16 October 2005).
[3] "Mobility Operations in an IED Environment," *Marine Corps Engineer School, Combat Engineer Instruction Company,* <http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mces/CEIC/Mobility Operations in an IED Environment.ppt> (16 October 2005).

operational capability by (FY 2007).[4] This operator MOS initiative recognizes that the combat engineer community's future vehicle demands cannot be answered internally per the current 1371 Table of Organization for engineer units, not to mention the full-time job responsibilities of training on and operating a platform such as the ABV. Given the requirements to operate the AVB, current 1371s could not be expected to adopt such a complex secondary duty.[5]

Additionally, the blast-mitigating Hardened Engineer Vehicle, or Cougar, (twenty-seven of which were purchased and delivered directly to theater during Operation Iraqi Freedom II), the Interim Vehicle Mounted Mine Detection System, and the Mine Protected Clearance Vehicle, or Buffalo, represent three more engineer vehicle platforms recently introduced to the Marine Corps. These additions will ultimately require future consideration in respects to vehicle manning requirements for future engineer organizations, and subsequent manpower adjustments to increase the Marine Corps combat engineer population.[6]

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[4] U.S. Marine Corps 2005 Concepts and Programs. (Washington, D.C., 2005), 159.
[5] "Assault Breacher Vehicle." *GlobalSecurity.org.* <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/abv.htm> (17 October 2005).
[6] "Mine/Countermine Operations," *Marine Corps Engineer School, Combat Engineer Instruction Company,* <http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mces/CEIC/Mine/Countermine Operations.ppt> (16 October 2005).

A 1371/1372 MOS division can easily dovetail off of these current initiatives. As the effective reach of the engineer community expands outward to support a multitude of smaller-scale engineer operations abroad, leaders must also focus internally, specifically upon the capabilities and limitations of the individual combat engineer, to ensure that the right Marine, with the necessary level of training, is directed to the correct unit and mission to utilize those skills.

The Schoolhouse Solution

In order to ensure that routinely applied engineer skills are resident in both engineer MOS's across each element of the MAGTF, 1371 and 1372 engineers would be initially trained to baseline ITSs, emphasizing general disciplines that span the missions of mobility, counter-mobility, survivability, and general engineering. These basic competencies should be instructed to both MOS's in a general 1370-designated course of instruction at MCES.

After completing this basic phase of engineer instruction (taking place over the required number of weeks to ensure adequate student exposure and practical application), students would transition to their respective 1371 or 1372 specific instruction programs. CSSE and ACE-bound 1371s would focus on more specific skill sets associated with expeditionary airfield and support area operations, such as RRR, deliberate horizontal

and vertical construction, soils analysis, and heavy equipment operations. GCE-bound 1372s would, on the other hand, focus on division-specific missions, to include mine/countermine operations, urban breaching techniques, IED prediction, detection and defeat, and improved integrated training as secondary infantry.

Overcoming Institutional Insistence on Cross-Pollination

The current institutional practice of transferring enlisted engineers across the MAGTF at different stages of their careers (and the association of a career track with a 1371s exposure to all facets of the MAGTF) is outmoded and dilutes the skills-base of engineer units comprised of Marines greatly experienced in particular ITSs per the unit's mission. Two distinct MOS's will permit both lateral transfers and movement of 1371s between the CSSE and ACE, but will permit the crossover of 1372 engineers to and from the CGE only as missions dictate. The presence of senior, career-specialty engineers who have trained and operated extensively in their 1371 or 1372 specialties will ensure that quality training programs exist in all MAGTF engineer units.

Conclusion

Assigning engineers that are appropriately equipped to serve in a particular MAGTF element's engineering functions will not only ensure that skills appropriately resident to that element remain resident, but always cutting edge, with enlisted

engineers of all ranks ready and capable of conducting training and performing in real-world operations to the ITSs expected of their ranks. The career seeding of both 1371 and 1372 engineer occupational field specialties in their respective MAGTF element functional areas will ensure that mission readiness within these engineer units is always measured to professional standards and skill atrophy in engineers is systematically avoided.

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